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## Arabs and Muslims as Seen by Polish Clergy Pilgrims to the Holy Land in the 19th Century

### Abstract

Nineteenth century was an era of extended pilgrimage movement to the Holy Land. Due to communicational facilities falling out from the Industrial Revolution and political changes (weakening of the Ottoman Empire and increasing penetration of Levant by the European countries) more and more Europeans decided to travel to Palestine basked in an aura of holiness. An equally meaningful factor was also an image of an ancient and mysterious Orient molded by the artists of the Romantic period. Poles also followed this trend and many pilgrims published their memories and reflections.

Such pilgrims as Ignacy Hołowiński, Feliks Laassner, Feliks Gondek and Karol Niedziałkowski (worth mentioning all of them were priests) were obviously focused mainly on religious issues. However they were keen observers and left more or less detailed but always interesting testimony of everyday life of Muslim and Arabic dwellers of Levant. They described Middle Eastern customs and rites. This work focuses on those subjective images which equally present the Levantine ways of living, Poles' level of knowledge on Orient and shaping ethnical stereotypes.

### Keywords

Holy Land, Polish clergy pilgrims, Niedziałkowski, Hołowiński.

### Introduction

Pilgrimages to the Holy Land have been one of the constituent parts of religiousness of Europeans at least since the early Middle Ages. Jerusalem – believed to be the city where the greatest act of salvation took place – attracted Christians who wanted to see for themselves the site where Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified and say a prayer by his grave. The conquest of Palestine by

Muslims did not hold back the wave of pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land both by land and by sea. First confirmed cases of Poles participating in these pilgrimages are referring to the Polish knights taking part in crusades led by German rulers. These cases are, however, considered rare and poorly documented. The first comprehensive narrative of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land written in Polish was *Peregrination or Pilgrimage to the Holy Land* [Peregrynacja albo pielgrzymowanie do Ziemie Świętej] by Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł.<sup>1</sup> The 17th and 18th centuries were a period of development of memoirs and the genre of travel literature as Europeans had become increasingly interested in the surrounding world. There was a growing number of pilgrimage narratives and travels to the Middle East. Compendia trying to present the current state of geographic knowledge were also becoming more and more popular as e.g. the work of Karol Wyrwicz entitled *Contemporary Geography or Physical and Political Description of Kingdoms, Countries, All States, their Governments, Laws, Crafts, Trade, Industry, Features, Habits etc. Published for the Benefit of the Youth of the Nation* [Geografia czasów teraźniejszych albo opisanie naturalne i polityczne królestw, państw, stanów wszelakich, ich rządu, praw, rzemiosł, handlu, przemysłu, przymiotów, obyczajów etc. Ku pożytkowi młodzi narodowej wydana] published in 1768.<sup>2</sup>

A true pilgrimage boom can be, however, noticed later in the 19th century. The Industrial Revolution changed the way of travelling as railroads and steam engine significantly reduced transport costs. Also, the contemporaneous political situation was favourable from the point of view of the pilgrimage movement. Ottoman Turkey was experiencing a serious crisis that was not overcome by the series of Tanzimat Reforms taken at the end of the late 1830s. Military and economic weakness of the Sublime Porte forced the sultan to make concessions to the European powers. France and Russia competed for the position of “official protector” of all Christians in the Holy Land. Consular representations of these powers based in Jerusalem since the 19th century (British since 1838, Prussian since 1842, French since 1853 and Russian since 1858) have been taking care of their political and economic interests (Myszor 2017: 59).

In the middle of the 19th century associations and committees specialized in organizing the entire undertaking of pilgrimages to Palestine began to function. Getting to the destination of the journey became as easy as never before and also relatively inexpensive. The cost of the entire trip was paid in advance and pilgrims were provided not only with transport but also with a guide who was supposed to take care of them at the destination point. Polish people mostly

<sup>1</sup> Radziwiłł did the pilgrimage in years 1582–1584. He wrote his narrative in Polish, however, it was published first in Latin in 1601.

<sup>2</sup> More detailed information about Polish pilgrimages and journeys to the Middle East in the 18th century in: A. Żal-Kędzior, *Obraz Ziemi Świętej w polskim piśmiennictwie geograficznym i podróżniczym osiemnastego wieku*, Toruń 2010, p. 13–62.

used help of the Austrian St. Severino Association (Gondek), whose ships were leaving from Triest. Equally popular was the route from Odessa port located these days in the Russian Empire (Niedziałkowski). Rarely pilgrims from Poland used help of the French committee *Oeuvre des pèlerinages en Terre Sainte* shipping in Marseille (Iwanowski). Most of the pilgrims from the Polish territories whose travel narratives are nowadays available to read were priests. However, it does not mean that only domines and monks were making the pilgrimages to the Holy Sepulchre. Among the wide array of secular travellers to the Holy Land worth mentioning in this paper are e.g. one of the most eminent Polish Romantic poets Juliusz Słowacki (pilgrimage in years 1836–1837), writer Władysław Wężyk (1839) and Cracovian journalist Maurycy Mann (1852–1853). An excellent overview of the Polish travellers and pilgrims has been presented by Jan Stanisław Bystron in his work considered classic nowadays *Poles in the Holy Land, Syria and Egypt* [Polacy w Ziemi Świętej, Syrii i Egipcie]. This panorama was forty years later completed by Jan Reychman in his work *Polish Travellers in the Middle East* [Podróżnicy polscy na Bliskim Wschodzie w XIX wieku]. However, he focused mainly on terrains beyond the Arab world (Turkey, Persia, the Caucasus).

The main aim of this paper is to recapture the image of the Arabs-Muslims emerging from the pilgrimage narratives written by Polish travellers. Due to the limited volume of this work, the list of authors was reduced only to those priests whose narratives focused mainly on religious matters and on experiencing closeness with Jesus Christ during the journey through his homeland. Despite that, sometimes they turned out to be very careful observers as they paid attention to foreign customs, costumes and ceremonies. They were depicting colourful and vibrant mosaic of cultures and religions of the Middle East, so different from their native landscapes of Lesser Poland, Greater Poland or Ukraine – sometimes with their romantic fascination for exotic Orient, sometimes with a sense of superiority which was typical for the European people from the second half of the 19th century.

## Authors

The earliest discussed narrative includes a description of a pilgrimage of priest Ignacy Hołowiński who has later became the Catholic archbishop of Mogilev. Hołowiński graduated from the Imperial University of Vilnius with MA degree in theology. He was also a loyal subject of Nicholas I. Publishing memories from his expedition to the East was only a part of his literary work. He dealt with both prose and poetry and he also translated Petrarka's and Shakespeare's works into Polish. In his literary works he raised philosophical and theological issues. Hołowiński started his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1839 as a young

thirty-two-year-old chaplain of the University of Kiev. He boarded the steamboat *Alexandra* in Odessa where the first lap of his journey began. He arrived in Constantinople where he met, among other people, a missionary Franciscan Manswet Aulich – an expert on Turkey and attendant of Poles who had been thrown by fate to Istanbul. Hołowiński also made friends with an exceptionally colourful person – Jesuit Maksymilian Ryłło with whom he made a further trip to Lebanon. Thereafter he visited Damascus and continued his journey through Sidon, Acre, Haifa, and Nazareth. When he finally reached Jerusalem he was trying to make the most of his time in Palestine by consecutively visiting other places related to the life of Christ or other important biblical figures. From the Jaffa Port he started his journey back and he arrived in Kiev just before Christmas. Professor Bystron considers Hołowiński's work to be the most interesting and best Polish narrative containing a description of the Holy Land. However, he also points out the author's lack of writing craft, his very extensive, ergo tiresome descriptions and "bloated affection". On the other hand, Bystron appreciates Hołowiński's enthusiasm and his emotional approach to the pilgrimage (Bystron 1930: 185). A good opinion about this literary work is also shared by later researchers, such as Jan Reychman (1972: 33) and Dorota Kulczycka (2012: 448–451). The young chaplain used his best efforts to prepare himself for the journey. He knew not only the narrative written by prince Radziwiłł but also the popular in Europe in the first half of the 19th century Lamartin's and Chateaubriand's descriptions of Palestine.<sup>3</sup> While writing his memoir after the whole trip, he often refers to the works written by ancient authors, fathers of church and also by contemporary orientalisks. However sceptical to the people of East, Hołowiński was a child of his times – often showing surprisingly romantic naivety. This attitude can be seen, for example, during his way from Damascus to Sidon while he encounters a local warlord and brigand Mir Bashir. In the eyes of a young chaplain brigand appeared as a noble prince from the mounts of Lebanon, taken straight from the stories written by lord Byron (Hołowiński 1853: 191–195, 211–212).

In 1843 Feliks Laassner – Polish Franciscan born in Gdańsk – starts his six-year mission in the East leaving from Chocz in Greater Poland. After a few months' stay in Rome and obtaining the Pope's permission to go to Egypt, he sailed to Alexandria. Laassner spent a few years both in Egypt and the Holy Land. In 1848, due to serious health problems, he went to Malta. Unfortunately, his bad health state did not let him continue his mission in the East and he had to finish it next year in 1849. He wrote his memoirs after his return to Poland where he settled for a few years in the Franciscan monastery in Kraków.

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<sup>3</sup> Hołowiński as well as the other authors were familiar with Chateaubriand's *Travels in Greece, Palestine, Egypt, and Barbary, during the years 1806 and 1807* [Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem] published in 1811 and Lamartine's *Travel to the East* [Voyage en Orient] published in 1835.

Laassner's narration is a manifestation of the author's erudition: he often refers to the works written by German, British and French pilgrims such as the famous Swiss traveller and orientalist Ludwig Burckhardt. Laassner is well-oriented in the history of the Holy Land and often completes his descriptions with stories from the Holy Bible and refers to historical events like crusades or the expedition to Egypt led by Napoleon in 1798. He is conscientious and accurate and at the end of the book he adds an annex in which he describes the history of the Franciscan missions in Egypt and in the Holy Land and also discusses the contemporary issues of taking care of the poor people and running schools for the young Christians. During his relatively long stay in the East, Laassner had the opportunity to travel to regions where *average* pilgrims rarely travelled, e.g. the Sinai Peninsula where he had a chance to watch Bedouins and their way of living. All the time spent on the mission allowed him to take a closer look at the daily lives of Egyptians – he shares with readers his personal remarks on Arab women, describes dancing dervishes and indigenous costumes, and also local customs. (Bystron 1930: 138–140, Kulczycka 2012: 457–459)

Ten years after Feliks Laassner's return, in March 1859, Feliks Gondek – a parson from Krzyżanowice – a small village located near Bochnia and the author of the next narrative, started his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In contrast to his predecessors, this thirty-eight-year-old man was already benefitting from the aforementioned conveniences of the Industrial Revolution that had changed the face of the world in the first half of the 19th century. The whole route from Bochnia to Trieste – where the ship sailing East was already waiting for him to board – he made quickly and comfortably by rail. Furthermore, the whole trip was already paid in advance. The Austrian St. Severino Association was responsible not only for transporting their customers to the East, but also taking care of them in place. The whole trip was “cheaper, safer and more accurate”<sup>4</sup>. (Gondek 1862: 1) The pilgrimage route led by sea through the Greek islands, then the coasts of the Asia Minor and Lebanon and then finally overland to Jerusalem. The way back led from Jaffa by Alexandria to Trieste by sea and then further North by rail. Like his predecessors, Gondek was mainly focusing on experiencing the journey in the footsteps of Jesus. He was not a type of a traveller and his longest journey before the pilgrimage had been – as he underlines himself – the one to Kraków. He drew from the knowledge from his predecessor's narratives. He knew both memoirs of Hołowiński and Laassner, he was also familiar with the Western literary works. In his own narrative Gondek often bases on quotes and cites the opinions of aforementioned authors, so professor Bystron considers him and his successors as “writers whose works were dependent and unvarying”. (Bystron 1930: 248) However, the memoirs of a parson from Krzyżanowice do not lack his personal remarks about the encountered Muslims and these excerpts

<sup>4</sup> This and any other quotes were translated by Agnieszka Seweryn, unless otherwise stated.

show a surprisingly high level of Gondek's writing independence. (Kulczycka 2012: 445–447)

The fourth of chosen narratives belongs to priest Karol Niedziałkowski – a provost of seminary in Sandomierz who later became an ordinary in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lusk. Niedziałkowski describes his journey to Jerusalem made in 1894. His expedition clearly illustrates the changes that took place in the pilgrimage movement in the 19th century. He is travelling in convenient conditions and the organizer of the pilgrimage is taking care of all his needs. Niedziałkowski departs on September 22nd from Odessa and sails to Constantinople, wherefrom he safely and comfortably reaches Jaffa. He visits the Holy Land according to a planned program including Jerusalem, Nazareth and Mount Carmel. On the way back, bad weather impels him to have a forced stop in Egypt which does not obtain priest's approval. With a clear sense of relief, he finally reaches Odessa by the end of November. Jan Bystron calls Niedziałkowski "a strange writer and a peculiar pilgrim". (Bystron 1930: 260) Actually, it is really hard to have any warm feelings for this always complaining, sceptical and mean narrator who considers people of the Levant as inferior human beings and is neither attracted to nor fascinated with the exotic Orient. Niedziałkowski is clearly afraid of differences and anything that does not fulfil the European standards. His narrative does not have much artistic value and is often flat. However, it can be considered as an expression of petty bourgeois mentality with its characteristic features such as eurocentrism and disdain for the other civilisations.

## Women

Regardless of the fact that all four narrators belonged to the ministry, none of them refrained from commenting on the encountered women. Hołowiński and Gondek are impressed by the beauty of women in the Middle East. The first one considers them "natural born beauties" (Hołowiński 1853: 270) whereas the second one describes them as "extremely nice with alabaster skin" (Gondek 1862: 224). Both of them, however, quickly come up with some objections. Hołowiński remarks that Arab women – although they are naturally beautiful – mar their faces with tattoos. They paint their lips and eyelids blue and they tattoo three vertical lines below their lips (Hołowiński 1853: 270). Laassner gives similar remarks on "make up", but also brings up light brown henna tattoos on their hands (Laassner 1855: 271). Decorating the body with henna is still popular in Arab countries nowadays. 18th and 19th-century travelers like Carsten Niebuhr, Isobel Burton and Johann Ludwig Burckhardt also mentioned blue tattoo (Balfour-Paul 1997: 164–165). Niedziałkowski expresses his opinion on the beauty of Muslim women as well, but his point of view is slightly different.



He gives examples of an enthusiastic description of charming “Muslim ladies” from Edmondo de Amicis’ work entitled “*Constantinopoli*”<sup>5</sup> but does not share that fascination himself, stating that “anyone who had not seen them cannot even imagine how ugly these ladies look. They are usually small and podgy and covered up to their feet with bronze or black veils. They look like large covered walking samovars”. (Niedziałkowski 1898: 24)

In the given description of Middle Eastern women, the romantic idealism so typical for the first half of the 19th century is replaced by sceptical pragmatism of the end of the century. Gondek – born in 1821 – writes: “They tastefully clothed themselves in two white sheets stitched to each other that reflected very beautifully close to their unusually pleasant faces, which brings to mind pure alabaster, and with their slow and uncertain goose-like walking style they were looking like heavenly beings who had flown down to Earth and were still unable to walk on the ground” (Gondek 1862: 224–225). Thirty five years later Niedziałkowski shows a much more critical attitude: “I was staring at local women with the highest compassion. They were walking in very long hoar shirts and veils that leaved only their eyes uncovered. The outer layer of that veil was connected to the nether one with strap or another thong going through a woman’s forehead and nose, and decorated with brass rings – just like we decorate our harness. Moreover, that resemblance to the sumpters or overworking cattle made me full of compassion to these poor creatures. What were they if not the cattle?”. (Niedziałkowski 1898: 495) In Niedziałkowski’s narrative Arab women<sup>6</sup> are always hidden behind veils, however, his predecessors remark that – especially in the lower social stratus – it is possible to encounter women with exposed faces. That observation is not related to the changes that took place in the Arab world, but to the fact that Gondek, Hołowiński and above all Laassner spent more time in the Holy Land and were more interested in local customs and traditions.

The last one of those three authors also draws attention to women facing almost complete social exclusion and – what is quite surprising for Laassner – separation of sexes: “it is impossible to see any woman who receives visitors as a real housewife does. Women do not eat together with their men, and, most of all, they do not participate in any public events” (Laassner 1855: 250). This kind of approach also involves wearing veils that women can take off only at home.<sup>7</sup> However, this practice is not criticized by the authors and they even

<sup>5</sup> First published in Milan in 1877. Polish translation by Maria Siemiradzka dates back to 1879 and was published in Warsaw.

<sup>6</sup> It does not apply to Turkish women. Niedziałkowski writes that since the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 approximately half of Turkish women do not cover their faces or wear only a veil like Christian women do. K. Niedziałkowski, *Wrażenia z pielgrzymki do Ziemie Świętej*, Petersburg 1898, p. 85.

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting that Laassner rightly connects wearing a veil to the ancient times giving such examples as the Achaemenid Persia and the Greek poleis.

– as the ministry people – seem to agree with one of the opinions quoted by Laassner, claiming that “giving woman a possibility to live a freer life only arouses her lust of vanity. No boundaries are known by women who only render their husbands harried, making them unhappy” (Laassner 1855: 251). Gondek expresses his approbation of distribution of sexes and strict social customs in a more distinct way: “In the East they have completely different customs than we have in Europe, both Turks and Christians. You will never and nowhere see a man along with a woman, walking or standing on the street. Nightly wandering by the corners of the streets, extraordinary and shameful familiarity, men laughing and giggling with women, lewd and inappropriate jokes – you can see all of that in civilized Europe but you will not experience any of that in the East, even if you spend there one hundred years” (Gondek 1862: 220).

The authors of the narratives show their understanding for separation of sexes<sup>8</sup> and lower social position of a woman in the Middle East<sup>9</sup> but they also – excluding Niedziałkowski – underline respect for the Arab women. While describing relentless tangles and robberies among the Arab people, Hołowiński writes also that “if any child or any woman carries food or merchies unescorted then no one dares to reach out for a pray. And if someone breaks this custom then the whole generation takes a weapon of revenge” (Hołowiński 1853: 562). Laassner states that “even the most wretched peasant does not dare to commit even the slightest decency against a woman” (Laassner 1855: 368–369). We can find here the echo of the romantic image of the Arab people showed as chivalrous and noble bandits in some literary works such as, for example, *One Thousand and One Nights*, Byron’s works or Mickiewicz’s *Szanfary*.

## State

Officially, the whole Middle East in the 19th century was under the Ottoman rule but the situation was in fact much more complicated. While Ignacy Hołowiński was starting his pilgrimage from Kiev, the remnants of the defeated Ottoman army were retreating north after their being defeated by the Egyptian army led by Muhammad Ali in the battle of Nezib. The young priest, as the only one, gives a detailed description of the political situation in Turkey, although he focuses more on the recent Tanzimat Reforms and their influence on Turks’ religiousness than on the political turmoil and Turkish rivalry with Egypt (Hołowiński 1853: 67–75). Father Laassner’s mission falls by the

<sup>8</sup> The first suffrage movements in the Western countries date back to the end of the 19th century.

<sup>9</sup> Gondek underlines that this phenomenon does not come from the antipathy for women, but from the ingrained custom. He considers them to be praiseworthy and favourable for the biblical purity of customs. F. Gondek, *Wspomnienia z pielgrzymki do Ziemi Świętej w 1859 roku odbytej*, Kraków 1862, s. 220.



end of the reign of Muhammad Ali. Both Turkey and Egypt were weakened so they stopped showing their open hostility but the Middle East was still torn apart by internal conflicts (clashes in Kurdistan and a series of massacres of Assyrian people in Hakkari in 1843 and 1846). Parson Gondek arrives in Palestine shortly after the official victory of Turkey but also after the Crimean War which had made Turkey submissive to the Western powers. Next year, in 1860, contained for a long time conflict between the Maronites and the Druze erupts. In both aforementioned narratives, the current policy is, however, utterly marginalized and omitted. The authors focus solely on the pilgrimage issues limiting their comments only to curt opinions on the state of the Ottoman Empire in general. In 1894 when Niedziałkowski gets to Palestine through Constantinople, a diagnosis of Turkey given forty years ago by tsar Nicholas I, defining it as “a sick man of Europe”, is still current. The illness seems to deepen and, despite attempts to reform the country, Turkey is often treated as a subject, not as an object on the international political scene. For sixteen years (the Treaty of Berlin signed in 1878) the bigger part of the Balkans were beyond the Turkish control. And for twelve years (the ‘Urabi revolt in 1882) Egypt was *de facto* an English protectorate and the rest of the Sublime Porte’s belongings in Africa was under the influence of France. Niedziałkowski is aware of these events so he refrains himself from making any comments on foreign policy. Thereupon, not much of the great policy can be found in Polish narratives discussed in this paper. In the wake of its external attenuation, Turkey experiences also a severe internal crisis. Poorly managed and spoiled by the corruption, the empire functions worse and worse and this fact does not escape our pilgrims’ notice. One of the symptoms of state weakness and corruption is the tax system. Both under the rule of Egypt and under the direct authority of Istanbul, people of the Middle East were overwhelmed with high tributes which were not improving their quality of life. Contrarily, according to the authors of the narratives, it was one of the main causes of poverty and misery among Arabs. As Hołowiński notices, “it is impossible to completely blame those poor people because that nation, brought by its last misery to despair, resorts even to looting to protect itself from starving to death. Nevertheless, the Egyptian government rips those people off by charging not only taxes from the major agricultural production but from everything as, for example, from horses, cows, goats, broadbeans. Thus, you have to pay taxes from everything” (Hołowiński 1853: 235). Gondek accompanies his words: “they do not work in soil because why should they work if the Turkish government is lying while waiting for their work? If only one of them gains a small wealth, pasha will immediately take it away from him giving different invented reasons. That is why you can always see those people idling” (Gondek 1862: 60). Moving the centre of power from Cairo to Constantinople did not make much changes in the ordinary people’s lives.

The feeling of superiority can be more or less seen in each of these narratives. For pilgrims everything that is European is a synonym of order, civilization, and prosperity. On the other hand, everything that is Oriental means chaos, barbarism, and misery. Laassner, who tries in many cases to preserve the Christian humility and understand the East, describes Alexandria as follows: “the village, the city and the capital are currently all in one place, all jumbled and at the same time they represent both the European Enlightenment and the Arabian barbarianism” (Laassner 1855: 92).

The most evident contemptuous attitude for the Eastern way of living is showed by Niedziałkowski. During his forced stay in Egypt he stops in Cairo where – from the whole city – he visits only the European quarter which reminds him of his own home. He asks himself a question: “was it worth going to Cairo to see the European houses?”. He also answers himself: “maybe it was not but staring at those houses made me happy so I was staring at them. Anyway, the most exciting in Cairo were memories and remains of the Ancient Egypt. I am already disgusted with Arab people with all their belongings, I am already that annoyed by the East so once when I was wandering around the city I popped in a street where all the shops were ran by Muslims and all the people passing by were local I ran away in a hurry. I did not see the citadel, the alabaster mosque or the Mamluk’s Leap,<sup>10</sup> not even the tombs of the Caliphs falling into bits” (Niedziałkowski 1898: 481–482). What a strange writer and peculiar pilgrim!

Bad governance and corruption along with misery as a consequence are seen by the authors of the narratives as a constituent part of the East, especially Turkey. In 1839 Hołowiński notes: “...it is difficult not to notice the complete fall of power and energy in the whole East that seems to be waiting for anyone able to rule over it” (Hołowiński 1853: 423). Fifty years later Niedziałkowski gives his comments on Muslims ruling over the Holy Land: “I used to repeat from time to time after Damiani: *Turchi non sono gabasze*<sup>11</sup> – it is the whole and naked truth in political, economic and administrative relations. In the above mentioned terms, Turkey is a country that is eaten and chewed up by its officials and governors” (Niedziałkowski 1898: 319). According to the pilgrims, there is only one solution to this situation: “give Galilee under a different power and into more industrious hands and in several years it will be completely unrecognizable” (Gondek 1862: 48). Hołowiński writes in a similar manner: “oh, if only Judea had fallen into the European hands then it would have

<sup>10</sup> Mark Twain refers to this place as *Mameluke’s Leap*. It is believed to be a place in the Cairo Citadel from which Amin Bey, one of the Mamluks nobles’ jumped out on his horse during a massacre of Mamluks by Muhammad Ali in 1819. He was the only one who managed to save his life.

<sup>11</sup> These words are believed to be the words with which the Austrian vice-consul in Jaffa in the first half of the 19th century used to finish his sentences. Hołowiński mentions it in his narrative (p. 605). According to Niedziałkowski this sentence means “Turks are not able to... do anything good, for sure” (Niedziałkowski p. 48).

been strangely turning green out of its grave, and everyone would have been perplexed by her various and abundant fertility” (Hołowiński 1853: 587). Thus, the problem was clearly defined and the solution according to the ministry was simply, however it showed the mentality of the 19th century Europeans bearing the Kiplingian “white man’s burden”.

## Religiousness

In the 19th century the knowledge of Islam in Europe was already based on scientific research and oriental studies became a recognized field of study. Access to knowledge and results of research was also easy and common as never before. Polish contacts with Islam date back to the 15th century.<sup>12</sup> Despite the fact that Poland had disappeared from the maps, the Russian and Austrian invaders were maintaining increasingly intense diplomatic and economic relations with the Muslim world. However, the knowledge of Islam was, despite pilgrims’ reading and erudition, insufficient. It is worth mentioning that Hołowiński who was probably best prepared to his expedition was the notable exception – the others were more or less nonsolid in their preparation. Laassner mentions of a Muslim pilgrimage... to the Muhammad’s grave in Mecca (Laassner 1855: 96). Niedziałkowski’s story of building the Dome of the Rock explicitly shows that he considered Islam to be a false religion based on fairy tales and superstitions.<sup>13</sup> One of the reflections he made during his walk around Istanbul, emphatically shows his attitude towards Islam: “The author of Psalm 136<sup>14</sup> finishes it with the following energetic apostrophe: Daughter of Babel, doomed to destruction, a blessing on anyone who treats you as you treated us, a blessing on anyone who seizes your babies and shatters them against a rock.<sup>15</sup> I would apply it to that or those blessed who break down, mourn, turn into dust and wipe away from this world that whole blend of falsehood, stupidity and crime which is called Muhammadanism. Whosever hands do it, let them be holy and blessed because they will destroy the abomination in front of our Lord, they will satisfy justice and become avengers of the unrevenged injuries, blood and tears” (Niedziałkowski 1898: 38). The other authors show similar but not as negative attitude towards Islam. It is an understandable approach as all of them were Catholic priests

<sup>12</sup> First Tatars settled on the territories of Poland. Earlier, contacts between Poles and Muslims were casual and connected to trade deals. Since the 13th century there were also military conflicts between them.

<sup>13</sup> According to the Polish priest Umar was seeking for a place where the Jacob dreamed of a ladder. Only more than hundred years later Abd al-Malik allegedly created a fairy tale about the Night Journey of Muhammad. K. Niedziałkowski, *op. cit.*, s. 196–197.

<sup>14</sup> Niedziałkowski gives its number according to the Jakub Wujek Bible. In the Millenium Bible – like in the other contemporary English translations – it can be found under number 137.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=23&bible\\_chapter=137](http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=23&bible_chapter=137) [access: 19.11.2017].

and the Holy See did not put ecumenism as one of the professed values in 19th century.

The negative approach to the Islamic religious doctrine does not mean that the whole Muslim community was criticized. Comers from Europe were impressed by the real and authentic zeal of the Eastern people. Gondek writes: “but even a Turk could embarrass more than one Christian indolent to pray with his devotion” (Gondek 1862: 30). Ignacy Hołowiński best reflects this kind of approach: “if the Eastern people are only beginners in the field of science, inventions and anything that is connected to reason and critique comparing to us than I think that in religiousness and feelings we are like weak children when compared to them. European people are more like reason, and Eastern people more like heart”. (Hołowiński 1853: 75) There is also another aspect of religiousness that found favour with Polish pilgrims: all of them, to a greater or lesser extent, find the Ottoman religious tolerance positive. As Laassner writes, “the service of God in a local church – which is always open and numerously attended by devout people – does not suffer any difficulties from Muhammadans, and even using a church bell is permitted” (Laassner 1855: 89). Hołowiński thinks that the reason for Turkish people’s attitude towards other religions is the weakness of their own state and especially the ongoing Tanzimat Reforms which debilitated the Ottoman fanaticism even among simple people (Hołowiński 1853: 74). However, it is Niedziałkowski who went further in praise of religious tolerance: “I will immediately say the tall Christian denominations, and Catholics maybe even more than the others experience in the Turkish state the most comprehensive and complex freedom (...). Religious fanaticism has crossed to Europe. In the East – what I want to repeat again – the most comprehensive tolerance and freedom still remains” (Niedziałkowski 1898: 319). Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that the author of this sentence understands the word *tolerance* slightly different from its contemporary meaning – Niedziałkowski gives secular France as a total opposite of Turkey and the most intolerant country of his times. He also considers atheism and undermining religious authorities as the greatest evil possible. Religious policy of the subsequent sultans can be considered as a role model for every country as it shows that in the East – in contrary to Europe – the religious hatred does not exist and any conflicts and massacres such as, for example, the 1860 massacre of Christians in Damascus or a series of persecutions of Armenians beginning during Niedziałkowski’s pilgrimage were “nothing but political passions” and “these are purely political and national affairs” (Niedziałkowski 1898: 322).

## Arabs

As has been already mentioned, all four narrators belonged to the ministry. They were not stranger to preach, moralize and give some stereotyped comments on people from the East. Each of the authors came to Palestine with certain images created by, on the one hand, by contemporary authorities in the field of Eastern affairs and, on the other hand, by stereotypes existing in Europe. Therefore, they had to confront their image of Arab – which was more romantic according to Hołowiński, more realistic according to Laassner and Gondek, and more skewed according to Niedziałkowski – with the reality.

One of the features that were received positively by all four pilgrims was the Arab hospitality. Hołowiński had an opportunity to take part in local feasts on various occasions. He was particularly glad after a meeting with shepherds during his way back from the Dead Sea: “we barely convinced them not to kill a ram, in consequence, very hospitable Arabs had to settle themselves for curd, cheese and some baked bread” (Hołowiński 1853: 468). Laassner shares similar memories: “once, we approached again a Bedouin camp in a valley. We rode to their tents asking for water but instead of water they gave us, with the highest courtesy possible, a delicious sour cream” (Laassner 1855: 244).

Sometimes the pilgrims mention Arab robbers and frequent mugging, however, those are only historical and vicarious references as none of the authors experienced himself a real harm from the hands of legendary brigands like Abugosz who – according to Hołowiński – used to bother people travelling from Jerusalem to Jaffa before the Egyptian army restored order in that region (Hołowiński 1853: 599).

The fear of brigands was deeply rooted in the pilgrims' minds and they were always expecting the worst things possible so, in consequence, it led them sometimes to very funny situations. During his visit to the Lake Tiberias, Gondek reports: “I went too far around the lake and suddenly I saw a Bedouin's head rising from above the rock. He looked straight at me with his small piercing black eyes so I ran away screaming my companions' names. It is quite possible that this Bedouin would have chased me as I was there alone, but I scared him with my screams” (Gondek 1862: 72). In her work entitled *Images of nations in memoirs and diaries written between the 16th and 19th centuries* [Wyobrażenia o narodach w pamiętnikach i dziennikach z XVI–XIX wieku] Aleksandra Niewiara claims that “the most interesting phenomenon concerning the image of Arabs is connected to the psychological change. From brave brigands they used to be in the 16th century, they turned into lazy merchants in the 19th century” (Niewiara 2000: 65). Even if such a big change took place in reality, it cannot be clearly seen in any narrative written by the pilgrim priests. Laziness – often considered as an immanent feature of the Middle-Eastern people – is a stereotype that has more or less affected the image of Arabs created by the

pilgrims. Gondek writes: “they only sit under the walls of their homes where in the shadows of the fig trees they smoke pipes, chat and do nothing. In contrary, their wives and daughters have to endure the whole burden of household chores and daily life” (Gondek 1862: 60). On the other hand, Laassner raves about Egyptian deckhands who work on ships navigating on the Nile: “it seems to me that it is impossible to find better, more hard-working and restrained deckhands than those working here in Egypt” (Laassner 1855: 356).

Such contradictions were occurring more frequently. More reflective pilgrims as, for example, Ignacy Hołowiński were seeking for the true face of Arabs in these contrary features, such as generosity and greed, laziness and diligence, proclivity to aggression and hospitality. “In general, if one considers the nature of simple Arabs, he will see many contradictions, but it is their good side and their gentleness that always wins. You can sometimes hear about some kind of barbaric acts, but it will always be explained by the local customs. One can perceive everywhere here a mix of wilderness and supreme delicacy, complete deprivation, and the most ardent adherence to rights and habits”. (Hołowiński 1853: 562)

## Conclusion

The narratives written by priests constitute most of the narratives from the pilgrimages to the Holy Land in the 19th century written in Polish language. These works allow us to better understand the mentality of the pilgrims of that time and they show how small the changes in our way of thinking are in comparison to the 19th century. Stereotypes of the East dominating 200 or 100 years ago were skewing the image of the Middle Eastern society just like they skew it nowadays. The pilgrimage narratives are an interesting, though not easy source which lets us reconstruct the image of the Levant that is obviously simplistic and not always consistent with reality. Each author started his pilgrimage with his own gained experience and image of the East created by popular those days travel literature or poems written by contemporary poets fascinated by the exotic Orient. Travellers were also willingly reading papers written by the most famous orientologists of the 19th century. Equally important was also their worldview and, despite the fact that all four of them were priests, they significantly differed in their opinions on system of values and their view of the world. Ignacy Hołowiński was certainly most open and willing to confront his own knowledge with the reality. On the contrary, Karol Niedziałkowski was the most conservative one who was additionally convinced of his reason and moral as well as his civilizational and cultural primacy. Hołowiński's youth fell into the period of Romanticism, the Napoleonic Wars and the November Uprising in Poland with a chance of succeeding. Niedziałkowski grew up in



an atmosphere of political chaos and new trends that were intended to rise the Earth on its new foundations, at times of the – predestined to fail – January Uprising and also times of triumph of pragmatism over romantic idealism. The authors' age is also important here: at the beginning of his journey to Palestine Hołowiński was 32 years old, Laassner and Gondek were 38 years old and Niedziałkowski was 48 years old. Only generalising in regard to these reasons, we can list the common elements in their depictions of the Orient. All of them agreed that a woman had a lower social rank than a man, however, their opinions on this phenomenon varied. While they agreed that Turkey was weakened on the political scene, they commented differently on the scale of this failure and gave different reasons for that. Ottoman religious tolerance was also noticed by all of them, however, they gave various definitions of this term. To conclude, despite the fact that these narratives show us the incomplete pattern of thinking, a stereotype arising from them helps us to better understand the 19th century East and above all the pilgrims themselves who let the Polish people see Orient as they depicted it.

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